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NOTES ON LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM

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INTRODUCTION

The Libertarian Socialist Collective is publishing these "Notes on Libertarian Socialism" written by a Sydney anarchist in the mid-1970's not because they entirely agree with their content (or for that matter their tone) but rather because they are a good introduction to what might be called the 'leftist' (Libertarian Socialist - or Libertarian Communist) interpretation of anarchism that arose in Europe and Australia and later America in the 1970's. Of the other two interpretations - the 'third-worldist' or urban guerilla and the 'countercultural' - not much need be said although one doubts that today even an ordinary 'authoritarian' socialist would be as dismissive of the various themes of the cultural revolution of the 1960's and 1970's as is the author of the 'Notes' under discussion. We shall hence confine ourselves' to criticisms internal to the tradition and framework the author adopts.

The central criticism concerns the notion of defining anarchism in terms of 'freedom or anti-authoritarianism' (p 1). The various anarchisms do not have the 'idea of freedom' in common, or at least they do not have the same idea of freedom and in any case anarchism is not the only political position containing some idea of freedom. Obviously those 'anarchists' who want to replace the state with nothing at all (the various individualists) have a very different idea of freedom from those who want to replace it by different institutions or political structures (the anarchocommunists, 'Collectivists' and anarchosyndicalists. Indeed the individualists are much closer to the (extreme) C19th liberals and C20th minimal-state 'libertarians' than to revolutionary anarchism. And the revolutionary anarchists are in turn much closer to revolutionary marxism and communism. So let us forget this mistaken idea that there is some defining feature that all socalled 'anarchisms' have in common. There simply isn't.

There is something however that all revolutionary anarchisms have in common and that is the idea of a federative political and economic structure organised from the bottom up. It is this that distinguishes revolutionary anarchism from all orthodox marxism and leninism. Even when the latter admit the idea of federation or federalism (they usually attack it) the concept of federation from the bottom up is only applied to the political structure and the economic structure is treated in terms of centralisation and descending administrative authority. It is this difference that clearly distinguishes (contrary to our author - p 8-9) even the 1917 Lenin from anarchism. For both anarchosyndicalism and 'council' communism political structure is directly identical with economic structure and hence control by the base (a political principle at least verbally accepted by revolutionaries) is thus incompatible with centralised administrative authority just as it is in the more complex mixed economic and social-political structures of anarcho-communism.

The fact that revolutionary anarchism does advocate complex political and administrative structures in which there are both 'bases' and higher councils or committees of 'delegates' is further evidence that it is no use defining anarchism in terms of 'anti-authoritarianism' or bothering overmuch about Engels confusions about anarchism. And particularly not if one is going to become confused oneself. The main point here is that Engels is quite right to link authority and delegation and to see them as necessary. Nor did Bakunin disagree. Where he is wrong is to link this just to technical imperatives (here, p 4, our author is right) since it is an imperative of any complex organisation at all (a point our author tends to want to slide over). The point is that any delegation at all, any granting of a mandate to a representative, implies an authorisation with respect to the matter covered by the mandate. If I send, along with the others of my workplace, a delegate to a workers' council with a set of instructions that delegate can act with (and within) the authority of those instructions. Furthermore he will have the duty to do so. Of course the delegate may have his instructions revoked, may be replaced at any time and in general shall neither represent me permanently nor in all matters. But when he or she does represent me and my workmates it is with (and only with) our authorisation and hence by our authority.

This point, that there is a perfectly legitimate place for the concept of authority within anarchism, implies that all general talk of 'anti-authoritarism' is dangerous confusion of thought which can have (and has had) serious negative consequences. Indeed the author never really defines the term and operates with several implicit definitions of 'authority'. What rather is needed - and cannot be done here - is to follow up the start made by Proudhon and Bakunin of a critique of the bourgeois concept of (state) authority in order to clarify the idea of a libertarian social and political order.

This need is very plain in the "Notes" remarks on the state. It is now generally admitted that marxism has no theory of the state as such and the author borrows from Lenin and Engels precisely their most primitive ones and seems to conflate the vulgar marxist base/superstructure (economy/polity) distinction with the factual C19th separation of society and state apparatus. (p 8-9 & p 11-12). There doesn't seem any easy way of sorting out the confusion here. The party in Russia was not 'a merely representative organ, a superstructural element (p 11): it administered the economy. The separation of state and relations of production simply does not exist in the way the author thinks and neither does the bourgeoisie dominate the state through its control of the economy (p 12). (That it could dominate a government is a different matter). Rather the state is intended to guarantee its control in the economy. To the degree that a political structure exists under libertarian socialism the same general point holds. It is to defend and further develop the social economy. Certainly one would not want to counterpose the political power of the workers 'representatives' to the economic power of the workers in a libertarian system (as our author does p. 12). To control its representatives by its economic power (by strikes? by sabotage?) seems to presuppose that there is not a system of self-administration ascending federally but rather a central power (a political representation) has been errected over the economy. Representatives are controlled rather more simply by recalling, replacing or disauthorising them in a libertarian order.

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When one realises that libertarian socialism involves a completely new doctrine of representation and administration - as also of economic planning - one can forget the author's worries about how one might tell who a ruling party represents. Under a libertarian order there can be no ruling party because every representative receives instructions not from his or her party but from those he or she represents. But at present of course representation is on a very different basis and anarchists are very unrepresentative indeed. If they did become more 'representative' of the working people (I drop the term 'proletariat' which the author seems to think means manufacturing workers - p 12 again!) then there might be some point in reconsidering the old abstentionist posture (not of course to stand candidates but perhaps to dictate to the parties from outside parliament) but that seems too much a question of concrete political conjunctures to discuss here when we have no idea what a future libertarian movement might look like.

NOTES ON LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM

1. ANARCHISM & SOCIALISM

A distracting variety of ideas and practices go by the name anarchism. This is true of the past, as of the present. There are individualist anarchists (the Stirner tradition); there's bohemianism (e.g. Dada, Puturism); pacifism, religious and secular (from Tolstoy to A.J. Muste); terrorism ("propaganda by the deed"); nihilism; radical liberalism (especially in the U.S.A., e.g. Benjamin Tucker, more recently Paul Goodman); even advocates of laisser-faire capitalism use the word libertarian (Ayn Rand, Workers Party). As a French comrade wrote 80 years ago: "Anarchism has a broad back, like paper it endures anything". (1)

We are not going to delve into these "57 varieties" of anarchism. For details you can refer to standard histories. (2) We are concerned with socialism, with the broad working class movement of the 20th century. It is in this context that we encounter the historically most significant anarchist experiences. We need to study and understand these experiences so as to benefit our own revolutionary praxis.

In focusing attention on libertarian socialism, which is the unity of anarchism and socialism, we are not making an arbitrary selection. For despite the motley variety of positions alluded to above, all anarchism has a central theme running through it. The defining concept of any anarchism is freedom or anti-authoritarianism. This is what individualists, bohemians, terrorists, and "liberals who have chosen to call themselves anarchists" (3) have in common: the idea of freedom. Although we have in the rejection of authority a key notion common to all the various forms of anarchism, the unity exists only on the level of ideas (theory, ideology). On the level of program and action, decisive differences exist between libertarian socialists on the one hand, and all other anarchists on the other.

Anarchists who do not see the class struggle as the domain of their action, uniformly fail to translate their idea of freedom into a coherent mass practice. They fail to transform the idea of freedom into a widely acceptable class program; they cannot transform the idea into reality. This is true of all anarchists who are not socialists, who do not pursue class politics. Their fate is isolation or co-optation, in any case - impotence. Individuals, philosophical anarchists, urban guerillas, small circles or groups of propagandists remain cut off from influence: they're products of history which they're powerless to remake.

Let's glance at a recent example of "non-class politics': the counter culture of the 1960s and today. This movement of "youth rebellion" at its outset crystallised around certain distinctly anarchistic notions:

rejection of the work ethic (Dylan: "I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more").

non-violence ("Love and peace, man").

1. James JOLL: The Anarchists, London 1964, p.146.
2. Leonard A. KRIMERMAN and Lewis PERRY (eds): Patterns of Anarchy, New York 1966; George WOODCOCK: Anarchism, Cleveland 1962; JOLL: op.cit.
3. KRIMMERMAN and PERRY: op.cit., p.56.

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general anti-authoritarianism and non-conformity (esp. against parental authority, schools, etc.).

co-operation, a sense of communality.

Of course there always were other elements to the counterculture, some of them antagonistic to anarchism (e.g. mysticism). But this short list is enough to remind us that the counterculture is another anarchist movement gone wrong. It's ten years since the summer of flower children in Haight Ashbury. To date the activities of these ten years have achieved the following result: there are a number of people living in the country, often communally, trying to fit themselves into a rural petty-bourgeois mode of production. These ghettoes in the countryside act as one sort of outlet for people who cannot cope with the pressures of city work/life. Elsewhere the thing has become totally co-opted - the distinctive preoccupations of the counterculture have a mass appeal of the commercial market; their music, drugs fashion have become so many trendy commodities.

The flower children of a decade ago are only visible today as producers and/or consumers of this stream of commodities. The original weaknesses of the freak culture - its "do your own thing" individualism, its unbridled sexism, its white separatism (passive racism) - stand out quite glaringly today, even if years ago they were obscured by the ferment and enthusiasm of the movement's beginnings. Another bid for liberation fails to find solutions applicable to society as a whole, or to mobilise social forces capable of applying such solutions. History shows that the search for freedom outside the class struggle, always ends in failure.(4)

The view of anarchism as the union of freedom and socialism, is not a novel doctrine. Bakunin already grasped the matter when he said:

> "The serious realisation of liberty, justice and peace will be impossible so long as the vast majority of the population remains dispossessed in point of elementary needs, so long as it is deprived of education and is condemned to political and social insignificance and slavery - in fact if not by law - by the poverty as well as the necessity of working without rest or leisure, producing all the wealth, upon which the world now prides itself and receiving in return only such a small part thereof that it hardly suffices to assure (the worker's) bread for the next day . . . we are convinced that freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice, and that socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality." (5)

What Bakunin is arguing here is that the "serious realisation of liberty" is possible only when exploitation, inequality, poverty and the "political" and social insignificance of the vast majority of the population are eliminated. But these are precisely the conditions generated and regenerated by capitalism. They are endemic to the capitalist mode of production, and can only be eliminated by the overturn of that mode of production. The serious realisation of liberty thus entails class struggle aimed at the destruction of the power of exploiters. Therein lies the integral connection between liberation and socialism.

When we examine the workers' movement of our times we find that it has, roughly speaking, three distinguishable strands, corresponding to the three great traditions of working class politics. The three strands are

4. Another example of non-class politics: bourgeois feminism (the struggle for the vote, for "equal opportunity," etc.)

5. G.P. MAXIMOFF (ed.): The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism, Illinois 1964, p.269.

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social democracy, communism, and leftism. We will have occasion to analyse these three components of modern working class politics in greater detail later on. For the moment we'll content ourselves with a preliminary general characterisation.

Social democracy is welfare/reform oriented, seeks power electorally for the purpose of administering a "mixed" economy, and is nationalistic/patriotic in relation to the rest of the world. Social democracy is thus not anti-capitalist, it is not revolutionary, it is not internationalist.

In the case of communism we need to distinguish between communism in power, and communism in opposition. Communism in power is the theory-practice (= theoretical and practical ideology) of a bureaucratic ruling class which exercises a dictatorship over the proletariat that is at times more ruthless than any capitalist dictatorship (Stalin).

Communism in opposition is today a more fragmented phenomenon, itself revealing at least three types of position. There are, first, the communist parties which are basically instruments used by the bureaucratic ruling classes of Russia and China to influence all classes in capitalist society. These are the "Moscow line" and the "Peking line" communist parties (in Australia: S.P.A. and C.P.A. (M-L)). Prior to Sino-Soviet split this type of communist party was predominant in every capitalist country. The second type of communism in opposition is exemplified by the communist parties of Western Europe, notably the Italian, French, Spanish and British parties. These are essentially parties in a more or less accelerated state of transition to social democracy. They are committed to the "parliamentary road" to socialism, and to class collaboration (popular front, historic compromise, etc.) Finally, communism in opposition has what might be called its left-wing, exemplified by the Fourth International and various Trotskyist groupings. The distinguishing mark of this communism is its internationalist outlook and its anti-Stalinism. (Some Trotskyist groupings are fairly close to what is here called leftism).

Finally, leftism. This refers to currents to the left of official communism. The major points of distinction of leftism include the following: internationalism (opposition to all forms of imperialism); a concept of socialism as the collective self management of the whole of society by those who labour to produce and reproduce that society; and a principled adherence to the view that revolutions can only be initiated and developed by the action of the mass of the exploited and oppressed themselves. These positions distinguish contemporary leftism from both social democracy and official communism. Libertarian socialism (anarchism) is central to modern leftism, for it alone can boast of actual success, of experience on the mass level (Spain).

This preliminary and very rough sketch of the modern working class movement should help us in locating our subject, anarchism. But before proceeding to further our investigation we have to clear up another matter. So far, we haven't said anything about Marxism. The vexatious question of the relationship between Marxism and anarchism has to be dealt with next.

2. MARXISM & ANARCHISM

From the time of Marx and Engels' conflict with Bakunin in the 1870s (resulting in Bakunin's expulsion from the First International) marxists generally have taken themselves to be strongly opposed to

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anarchism. Numerous polemics were waged by theoreticians of the 2nd International, by Mensheviks like Plekhanov, Lenin himself, etc. aimed always at placing anarchism at a distance from marxism. Conversely, anarchists have strenuously criticised and fought Bolshevik policies and have opposed the progressive deterioration of the Russian revolution.

There are real and important differences between libertarian socialists and many marxists. Do they amount to an antagonistic conflict? Do anarchism and marxism exclude one another? If not, what is the relation between them? I propose to approach these questions by examining Engels' critique of anti-authoritarianism; by looking at the theory of the revolutionary state (dictatorship of the proletariat) expounded by Lenin in 1917; and by discussing the issue of abstention from parliamentary activity on the part of revolutionaries. This should put us in a better position to assess whether conflicts between libertarian socialists and marxists are more significant than the many notorious conflicts among self-styled marxists.

2.1 Engels on authority - (6)

This is the most famous single antianarchist writing in the marxist corpus. In it Engels raises the question: can authoritarianism (defined as "the imposition of the will of another upon ours") be eliminated? He presents two arguments to show that it cannot.

The first states that the organisation required for the running of modern large scale industry by itself requires that restrictions be imposed on autonomy. This remains true even when "the land and the instruments of labour had become the collective property of the workers who use them," i.e. even after the expropriation and defeat of the bourgeoisie.

On the face of it, Engels is here putting forward a doctrine of pure technological determinism. He remarks that in a cotton spinning mill all workers "are obliged to begin and finish their work at the hours fixed by the authority of the steam, which cares nothing for individual autonomy." He generalises the matter when he says:

> "If man, by dint of his knowledge and inventive genius, has subdued the forces of nature, the latter avenge themselves upon him by subjecting him, in so far as he employs them, to a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation."

and to drive the point home he repreats the crucial phrase a few lines later:

> "On the one hand, a certain authority, no matter how delegated, and, on the other hand, a certain subordination, are things which independently of all social organisation, are imposed upon us together with the material conditions under which we produce and make products circulate."

The view that it is the machine itself that subordinates the worker, that the worker's loss of autonomy is a technological imperative, runs counter to some of the profoundest insights Marx gave us into the nature of economic organisation. (Needless to add, this technological version of the iron law of oligarchy is also a reactionary view.) It is of the essence of capitalism - the social formation which has introduced modern technology - that it disguises social relations by making them appear as "natural laws," as relations between humans and things. In particular, power relations and the conflicts involved in them, which are always contradictions between social forces, are disguised as contradictions arising from people's interactions with inert technology.

6. Frederick ENGELS: "On Authority," in: Marx Engels: Selected Works, Moscow 1951, Vol.1, p.575.

7. omitted.

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When people are in conflict with seeming natural forces, Marx teaches us to look behind the appearances and ask, what are the social contradictions which present themselves in the guise of a conflict between humanity and nature. When working hours appear to be fixed "by the authority of the steam," we need to ask: who turns the steam on at those hours and thereby compels workers to keep to those hours? In the same way, if it were said that prisoners are deprived of their freedom by the walls of their cells, we need to ask who places and keeps prisoners within those walls, rather than accept the naive view that the convicts are subject to the authority of bricks and mortar.

In Engels all this is lost, because his presentation is individualistic. This is understandable, since "On Authority" is a polemical piece written for an Italian readership familiar with the anarchists' arguments which were couched in individualistic terms. In the heat of ideological battle Engels adopts the terminology of his opponents, but this leads to error. To put the matter in terms of "individual autonomy" always makes it more difficult to break through to a clear view of the class relations involved. The error which results from Engels' individualistic presentation is that of not distinguishing between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. (8) The error, in other words, is that of conflating class conflict, which is irreconcilable and can only be settled by force or the threat of force, with conflicts among people which are not based on the irreconcilably opposed interests of classes, and which can be settled non-coercively.

Under capitalism, conflicts over the organisation of the process of production are always antagonistic conflicts, or at the very least have a strong antagonistic aspect. This is true even of conflicts among workers in this domain. When workers object to a newcomer to the job who causes a speed up by working faster than the rest - the objection has a basis in class struggle. Absenteeism, and sabotage, and pilfering are forms of class resistance. The conflict between scabs and strikers is highly antagonistic. These conflicts are settled by coercion or the threat of it: note the role of police in strike breaking, the behaviour of pickets, etc. But matters are fundamentally different once the workers are masters of production. The very same conflict which under capitalism was antagonistic - e.g. over hours of work, absenteeism, lateness, slacking, etc. - loses this character and becomes non-antagonistic, i.e. settleable by persuasion, argument, criticism and self-criticism, and without coercion. Once a worker does not confront another as the (temporary, unconscious) representative of exploitation, the conflicts which, as Engels rightly says, inevitably arise in the course of running

8. MAO TSE TUNG: "On Contradiction" (Section VI); and "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" (esp. Section I); both in Selected Readings from The Works of Mao Tse Tung, Peking 1971.

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a complex industrial system, lose their class dimension. From being political problems, they become educational problems. Engels is wrong to conclude that once the workers collectively control the means of production, conflicts among them will have to be settled by imposition or authoritarian means. Concretely this means that in a socialist society absenteeism will not be acceptable, but there will be no laws against absenteeism, nor police action against absentees!

Engels' second argument states that the revolution requires the use of armed force by one class in its struggle against another, and, in the period immediately following the overthrow, armed terror will be needed against the threat of counter-revolution. This statement is correct, and as an argument against pacifism it is conclusive. Engels however, sees his conclusion as a refutation of anti-authoritarianism. This is not correct. It conflates violence (use of force) and authority, which are not at all the same. Engels says:

> "The anti-authoritarians demand that the authoritarian political state be abolished at one stroke, even before the social conditions that gave birth to it have been destroyed. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority."

To understand the position which Engels is attacking one needs to get clear about the difference between the class violence of the proletariat on the one hand, and the political authority of the state on the other.

It is characteristic of the modern nation state that it is separated from all classes of society, standing over all classes, and from that height, as it were, it intervenes in society to protect the interests of the controllers of capital accummulation. Only in this way, by "standing off," can the state fulfill its essential role of legitimising the dictatorship of capital. Herein lies the difference between class violence and authority: the latter is not simply a concentration of power in the hands of a classbut rather a monopoly of legitimate violence. The breakdown of authority is primarily a loss of legitimacy by the State - when the masses stop obeying the law, when the law ceases to be enforced.

Another way of putting this: the State has an essential ideological role, beside, and supporting, its police role. This ideological role is that of extracting consent from the exploited classes. This essential ideological role is best served by an organisation of the State separate from the major classes of society. The capitalist dictatorship is not the direct rule of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it is typical of bourgeois class rule that it is exercised indirectly, at one remove (this is what allows the possibility of "Bonapartism"). (9) It is only where bourgeois society is in a grossly underdeveloped condition that one finds examples of a temporary exercise of direct class rule (e.g. the Hollywood cliche of the Western town without a Marshal where the good citizens have to take up guns personally . . . the plot of these movies usually ends on a Marshal being appointed). Direct rule is the most primitive form of bourgeois class rule which disappears with the development of capitalism's mature political superstructure. (Traces of the primitive re-emerge in crises, as eg. when students from Oxford and Cambridge scabbed on the 1926 British general strike.)

The class rule of the proletariat is quite different. Not only is the final struggle against the bourgeois state waged by direct mass action; the entire revolutionary process, extending beyond the overthrow of the old regime and in-

9. Engels in a letter to Marx (13 April 1866): "It is becoming ever clearer to me that the bourgeoisie has not the stuff in it for ruling directly itself, and that therefore where there is no oligarchy, as there is here in England, to take over, for good pay, the management of the state and society in the interests of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form." Karl MARX and Frederick ENGELS: Selected Correspondence, Moscow n.d., p.214.

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cluding all of what has been called the transitional period, is conducted by the armed masses themselves. Only dictatorship by the autonomous action of the class counts as dictatorship of the proletariat. Rosa Luxemburg makes the point clearly, in commenting on the claim that the socialist state is the capitalist state stood on its head.

> "This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist." (10)

The class rule of the proletariat is direct rule by the masses.

We are now able to state the proper meaning of the demand "that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority." This amounts to demanding that from the outset power shall be exercised by the working class itself, from within its own organisations (e.g. Factory Committees, Soviets). The old state, the bourgeoisie's indirect rule with its claim to legitimacy and impartiality, with its authority, is swept away, to be replaced by direct class rule. (Power to the people.)

Such direct rule by the proletariat will be violent (most likely), both in the course of setting up and in the process of consolidation. But it will not be authoritarian.

Engels' second argument is really misdirected. It has force only against dogmatic pacifists. The demand for "the abolition of the political state" is just what it says: the demand for the direct rule of the victorious class of exploited. It is not a demand for non-violence in one's treatment of the class enemy. The interesting thing here is that Engels elsewhere concedes the point at issue. In a letter, Bebel, written some 15 months after the publication of "On Authority," he says: "The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word." (11) Nor, we might say, was it authoritarian in the proper sense of the word!

We will return to the question of the state in connection with Lenin.

2.2 Lenin on the state -

In his political writings of 1917, culminating in The State and Revolution, Lenin makes two major points:

1. The working class, in its struggle for emancipation, cannot just take over the existing bourgeois state apparatus, and use it for its own ends. On the contrary, the working class in the course of its revolution must smash this state apparatus, it must dismantle and destroy it. (12)

2. The victorious proletariat will replace the bourgeois state with something else which is also a state (= an instrument of class oppression) but a very different state from a bourgeois monarchy or

10. Rosa LUXEMBURG: "The Russian Revolution" (Section VI); in Mary-Alice WATERS (ed.): Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York 1970, p.389.

11. MARX and ENGELS: Selected Correspondence, p.357.

12. See "The Civil War in France," in MARX and ENGELS: Selected Works, Vol.1, p.468.

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repressed. Such a separate entity is necessary only when it is also necessary to keep the repressed in existence (as a class): when it is an essential requirement of the social system that the working class reproduce itself in a servile condition, forever. Hence for the beginning of socialist construction, when this requirement no longer exists, Lenin advocates a commune-type regime in which the separation between "armed men" and the people, between legislature and executive, between highly paid bureaucrats and ordinary citizens, is overcome. The bourgeoisie's work of repression is never done. Not so the proletariat's. That is why the class can do its own dirty work (repression) and does not have to create a state separate from the class. (17)

What this means is that the aims of the dictatorship of the proletariat differ fundamentally from the aims of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The former seeks the abolition of classes; the latter the perpetuation of class domination/servitude. The difference in aim allows for a difference in method. In the one case, the rule of the bourgeoisie, the method is class oppression by the state; in the other, direct action by the class.

What is the object (target) of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Exactly who will be suppressed by this dictatorship? In very general, abstract terms the answer is that whoever embodies bourgeois class interests will be suppressed. In The State and Revolution, Lenin gives formulas like "control over the insignificant capitalist minority, over the gentry who wish to preserve their capitalist habits and over the workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism." (18) The dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin wrote in April 1918, must achieve

> "the ruthless suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, who cannot at once be deprived of their wealth, of their advantages of organisation and knowledge, and consequently for a fairly long period will inevitably try to overthrow the hated rule of the poor; secondly, every great revolution, and socialist revolution in particular, even if there is no external war, is inconceivable without internal war, i.e. civil war, which is even more devastating than external war, and involves thousands and millions of cases of wavering and desertion from one side to another, implies a state of extreme indefiniteness, lack of equilibrium and chaos. And of course, all the elements of disintegration of the old society, which are inevitably very numerous and connected with the petty-bourgeoisie (because it is the petty bourgeoisie that every war and every crisis ruins and destroys first), are bound to "reveal themselves" during such a profound revolution. And these elements of disintegration cannot "reveal themselves" otherwise than in an increase of crime, hooliganism, corruption, profiteering and outrages of every kind. To put these down requires time and requires an iron hand." (19)

17. Lenin in "The State and Revolution": "A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the 'state', is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state. It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage-slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage labourers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will begin to disappear. Naturally, the exploiters are unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing this task, but the people can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple "machine," almost without a "machine," without a special apparatus, by the simple organisation of the armed people (such as the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies..)." Selected Works, Vol.II, pp.303-304.

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18. Selected Works, Vol.II, p.312.

19. "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," in Selected Works, Vol.II, p.607.

The target of the dictatorship, then, are "the resistance of the exploiters," and "petty-bourgeois anarchy." But these are still only broad and general characterisations; guidelines, as it were. Who applies them? Who concretely decides on what to suppress? Answer: the proletariat as represented by the party. Not the class itself, but the class as organised in and by the party.

In 1913 Lenin argued that appeals to the will of the unorganised masses are empty, because "It is absolutely impossible to determine the will of a broad section that is not organised in an association - even a child would understand that." (20) On the basis of this principle he attacked anarchism as follows:

> "When an appeal is made to broad sections or to the masses against the organisation and at the same time the impossibility of organising those sections or masses is admitted, that is pure anarchism. The anarchists constitute one of the most harmful elements of the working-class movement because they are always shouting about the mass of the oppressed classes (or even about the oppressed masses in general), always ruining the good name of any socialist organisation but are themselves unable to create any other organisation as an alternative." (21)

In Russia in 1913 this was just criticism. (It also applies, one has to concede, to many anarchists since, including much of the contemporary far left.) In 1913 "the impossibility of organising the masses" in an anarchist sense was a fact that indeed had to be admitted. But in 1918 it was not a fact: in 1917-18 the workers were starting a process of self-organisation in factory committees and unions. The pre-eminent role of the party as the organisation expression of proletarian class interest was in conflict - not with a will gratuitously imputed to the unorganised masses - but with the (beginnings of) the real autonomous organisation of the class. Lenin described this as a conflict between marxism and anarcho-syndicalism. It was not however a conflict between rival theories, or between an efficient revolutionary mass practice (Bolshevism) on the one hand, and ideological posturings of a syndicalist hue on the other. No, it was a conflict between two actual ways of organising the class.

The party's claim to a monopoly of power - a monopoly of representing the proletariat - rested on its allegedly unique ability to organise the class in the fight for socialism. After October 1917 this claim brought the party into conflict with the independent self-organisation of the class. This conflicts inaugurated the growing separation of the party from the masses. The party, as the executor of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was thus confirmed in its role as a merely representative organ, a superstructural element. The new kind of state, by retaining a chain of command along which it imposes the will of the central committee on the class in whose name it wields power, creates the possibility of bureaucratic degeneration. The danger - only too horribly realised under Stalin - is that the party will turn from suppressing the resistance of the exploiters and the elements of

20. "How Vera Zasulich Demolishes Liquidationism," Marx Engels Lenin" op.cit., pp.251-252 (original emphasis).

21. Ditto, p.252

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petty-bourgeois anarchy to suppressing any source of opposition to its own rule, irrespective of the class content of the opposition.

If the new state is a superstructural element, the class nature of its rule will turn on its material basis. With this we come to what is perhaps the most significant question concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the basis of what relations of production are new political forms erected and maintained?

Lenin advocates a transitional regime in which the "special bodies of armed men" (army, police) is replaced by the armed people, (22) in which officials are elected and recallable and receive only average wages. This 'primitive democracy' - "not a state of bureaucrats but a state of armed workers" (23) - was never more than partially instituted during the Russian revolution. But even had it been fully established, Lenin's characterisation of it as a state, as a superstructural element, would be correct. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not only the repressive instrument of a class which is in a minority in society (Australia: the workforce in manufacturing industry is 25% of the total workforce), it is exercised not by the class directly, but by the party (vanguard of the class).

What makes a particular class the ruling class of a society? Is it that the party claiming to represent its interests is in power? That is not enough: there must exist in society a set of relations (of control over the means of production) on the basis of which the class can compel the party in power to act on its behalf. It is precisely this factor, the existence of capitalist productive relations in industry and everyday life, which sets the parameters of action for all parties in a bourgeois democracy. The capitalist class is the ruling class of Australia because it can ensure that whatever party is in power (Liberal or Labour), its own vital long-term interests are protected. The "new kind of state," therefore, can be seen as the dictatorship of the proletariat, even in the sense in which the Australian state is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, only if the proletariat exercises effective control over key productive relations, especially relations which convey decision making power within the factory and the economy. Only direct workers' self-management of production could justify the claim of a party in power that its rule is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Without such self-management on the factory floor and in economic planning, the working class cannot control its representatives, and bureaucratic revisionism (of thought and practice) becomes unpreventable.

Lenin not only did not fight for, or build, workers' self-management; he opposed it tooth and mail, carrying the majority of his party with him. This fight against workers' control of production was carried out on two levels: organisationally, by the subordination of factory committees to the trade unions, and of the latter to the state organs.

On this aspect of the matter, see BRINTON which gives all the documentation. (24) (And next time you hear a Trotskyist or other Leninist call for "nationalisation under workers' control," be sure to ask what exactly that means!).

The second level of attack on workers' self-management comprised Lenin's insistence on the necessity for state capitalism: the reappointment of the old managerial/technical staff at high salaries, the reorganisation of production

22. What is the meaning of this phrase in the nuclear age?

23. LENIN: Selected Works, Vol.II, p.309

24. Maurice BRINTON: The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, Detroit 1975

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along the most up-to-date capitalist lines (Taylor system), introduction of piece work, productivity bonuses, competition among workers, etc. etc. At this stage (1918), Lenin met the criticism that his economic policies amounted to state capitalism, by saying yes, that's exactly what we want - state capitalism plus Bolshevik power - socialism. (25)

In his arguments for this position Lenin goes right back to Engels of "On Authority." The capitalist method of organising production is technologically necessary in large scale industry; this method is also politically neutral in itself: it is exploitative if surplus value is privately appropriated under a state controlled by the bourgeoisie; but non-exploitative if the surplus value is controlled by the state in the hands of the party of the workers. The loss of autonomy which capitalist productive relations entail is seen as tending to being cancelled out (or compensated for?) by the fact that production is controlled by the workers' state.

The whole conception rests on the assumption of the neutrality or 'purity' of modern productive technology which can serve indifferently capitalist or socialist aims. (Echoes of Engels' technological imperative which is "independent of all social organisations"). But Lenin's basic perspective is wrong. The productive relations which developed under capitalism around an ever changing technology are not socially (politically) neutral. They require a docile and dependent working class, and as such, they militate directly against proletarian hegemony. Lenin's idea of "unquestioning obedience at work", combined with political meetings in the evening (26) is a prescription for a servile working class. History shows that; real life proves it: no better argument can be given to a marxist. The Chinese, whose economy was grossly underdeveloped in 1949, received their 'lessons' in organising production in large scale industry from the Russians. Not the least factor in the Sino-Soviet split was the recognition by the Chinese that the supposedly neutral technical aid given by the Soviet Union was in reality loaded with political content of an unsocialist bias. (They sent the Russians home and started a cultural revolution around the slogan 'Better Red Than Expert'.)

On this point, then, there is a fundamental conflict between the libertarian socialist "reading" of Marx, and Lenin's version. On the former view, social relations of self-management (especially in the direct organisation of production - on the factory floor) are absolutely essential features not only of fully mature socialism, but of the transitional period as well. Without making an immediate start on implementing self-managed productive relations, you cannot start on the road to socialism. Without sustained building of self-management, you cannot travel on that road. It is only on such a basis that any regime can hope to adequately reflect the interests of the workers. Under such conditions - immediate institution of the beginnings of self-management - electiveness of officials by the working class would be universal, and recall provisions would be in actual use. (Neither of these happened under Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat.) on the other hand, under state capitalism, irrespective of the party in power, the counter-revolution is already with us, and stalinism is waiting in the wings.

25. See "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," and "Left Wing Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality," in Selected Works, Vol.II.

26. Selected Works, Vol.II, pp.610-612.

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2.3 Indifference to politics

A traditional point of difrerence between marxism and anarchism is the latter's abstentionism, what Marx called its "indifference to politics". (27) Anarchists are supposed to shun parliamentary contests in favour of direct action. ("Don't vote, organise!"). Marxists by contrast insist on the need for political contestation of bourgeois rule; they take the form of this political struggle to be a tactical question. Abstentionism as a general principle needlessly deprives the working class of an important weapon. One works "from above as well as from below", as Lenin put it. (28)

Of course revolutionary socialists are (supposedly) not interested in joining any bourgeois government. Their role under capitalism, in and out of parliament, is that of opposition. That's the theory, but the reality is very different. In reality, the parliamentary record of socialists in Western capitalist countries has been a sorry one, from the opportunist sell outs of the Second International,through the popular fronts of the 1930's, to the 'historic compromises' of today. Even anarchists, at the head of a mass movement in Spain, joined a bourgeois government! The road to class collaboration is paved with electoral success.

Marx and Engels believed that in some countries (e.g. England, America) a parliamentary road to socialism is possible: Once the workers' party achieves an electoral majority it can proceed with the abolition of capitalism. Behind this theory of the parliamentary road to socialism lies the belief that the working class can become politically organised and strong only if it enjoys the traditional bourgeois liberties and rights - such as rights of political and industrial organisation, right of assembly, free speech, free press, universal suffrage, right to strike, etc. Given these freedoms, the proletariat will, by the development of capitalism itself, become the preponderant and eventually the leading class in society. In a democracy it can then hope to take political power and under its umbrella, proceed with the introduction of socialism. (As a corrollary, in countries where the bourgeois liberties are not well established or non-existent, only a revolution can usher in the beginnings of socialism).

This theory of the parliamentary road was formulated in the late 19th century, when bourgeois rule in Anglo-Saxon countries took a vastly more liberal form that was the case in the Eastern and Continental autocracies. When, roughly from the 1890's onwards, the labour movement in England and the Continent (France, Germany, Italy) took advantage of the democratic freedoms it has gained for itself, it entered a period of unprecedented growth. The fact that in some places the movement had a significant parliamentary wing which scored electoral successes, seemed not to dampen the class struggle. It looked as though parliamentary activity was at least one essential arena for the conflict between labour and capital, possibly even the most important political form of that conflict. Certainly, the anarchist alternatives then available - revolutionary syndicalism, terrorism - did not offer more success. However,1914 shattered all illusions. Parliamentarism led the working class away from its true interests, into chauvinism and the slaughter of world war.

27. MARX ENGELS LENIN: op.cit., pp.94-99.
28. Ditto, p.189

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The record of the 20th century is remarkably clear and unequivocal. No mass movement of the exploited, anywhere in the world, has managed to combine significant and successful electoral participation with retaining (let alone reaching) socialist objectives. In Britain and Australia the Labour parties were never more than parties of left-reform, lacking the basic intention to bring about the wholesale transformation of capitalist social relations. On the Continent, after the defeat of the revolutionary wave following World War 1, the working class movement split into social democrats and communists, the majority of the latter soon coming under Stalin's control. The split had the disasterous consequence of weakening working class resistance to the rise of fascism. In our times we have seen the horror of Chile, and are seeing the class collaborationist course taken by the European mass communist parties. It is above all to parliamentary 'representatives' of the proletariat that we can apply Albert Camus' dictum: "The historic fate of the working class is to be betrayed."

It is not enough, however, to remind ourselves of the dismal historical record. The failure of the parliamentary road to lead to socialism has to be theoretically comprehended.

Representative democracy, with its parliamentary elections, is a particular way of organising the political life of people. The single most essential feature of the democratic electoral mode of structuring politics is the passivity of the citizens in between elections. In its original, revolutionary form, in the 18th and early 19th century, liberal democratic ideology presented representative government as the regime which alone can express the will of the people. In that period, democracy expressed the interests of a rising class, the bourgeoisie - this is what made it a revolutionary doctrine. And democracy was in the interests of all classes other than the hereditary aristocracy. Things are very different today: the bourgeoisie is the ruling class, and its once-revolutionary conception of representative government as the expression of the will of the people has become an apologetic myth. This conception survives today only as rhetoric from the hustings, within the media, etc. Even the more sophisticated ideologists defending bourgeois democracy these days recognise the vacuity of the "will of the people" thesis, and frankly admit that democracy is no more than a system in which the people select those who make political decisions. The role of the masses is restricted to this periodic selection.

> "The voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect they must understand that, once they have elected an individual, political action is his business and not theirs."(29)

Nothing new in this statement, of course, except perhaps its cynical tone. A century ago, Bakunin had already observed:

> "On election day even the proudest bourgeois who have any political ambitions are forced to court His Majesty - The Sovereign People. They come to Him with their hats off and seemingly have no other will but that of the people. This, however, is for them only a brief interlude of unpleasantness. On the day after the elections everyone goes back to his daily business: the people to their work, and the bourgeoisie to their lucrative affairs and political intrigues. They do not meet and they do not know each other any more." (30)

29. J.A. SCHUMPETER: Capitalism Socialism and Democracy, London 1954,p.295.

30. MAXIMOFF: op. cit., p.219.

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are under immense pressure to leave politics to the politicians in parliament. Here too, the pressure for passivity has been more or less successful - so far.

The problem which any revolutionary movement faces is how to detach the working class (and its potential allies) from representative democracy - how to dissolve their parliamentary illusions. The classical anarchist response is to argue that you can only wean the masses from their parliamentary addiction by operating strictly outside the electoral sphere. Absentionism is thus erected into an inflexible and universal principle. Is this correct, or could participation in elections sometimes be the instrument for undermining the capitalist order?

The usefulness of participating in elections depends on how clearly one can distinguish between seeking power and using the democratic machinery (for revolutionary ends). It is a criterion of successfully drawing this line that electoral participation will be a marginal concern of the left, and the exercise of parliamentary power (joining a bourgeois government - popular front) will be completely ruled out. In my opinion this still leaves room for revolutionary participation in elections, under certain circumstances, with the reasonable expectation that such participation will further libertarian socialist objectives. One cannot describe these circumstances in their full particularity, but the following general considerations seem often to apply:

1. "Better the better than the worse." Sometimes the class struggle can be conducted on more favourable terms under a social democratic than under a conservative government. The difference that elections can make may be one of lessened state repression, or the end of a war or imperialist venture, or an international realignment, etc. If this is so, and other things being equal, libertarian socialist ought to vote for social democrats, not on the ground that they support social democracy, or even "critically support" it, but on the quite different ground that the whole system in which centrist and rightwing bourgeois governments alternate, can be struggled against more readily when social democrats are in power than when conservatives rule.

2. "Tribune of the people." If you can elect a few individuals to parliament who can use it as a forum, a focus of denunciation, etc., such an opportunity can be taken up. A recent example is Bernadette Devlin's election to Westminster on a P.D. ticket.

3. Sub-national governments (e.g. municipal government) are a special case: their power is severely limited "from above", and there is potential in expliting and sharpening the contradictions that arise out of this limitation. Libertarian socialists should not rule out the possibility of contesting municipal elections with a real will to take office if they win.

4. It's sometimes said that small movements can assist their own growth and development by the exposure, publicity etc. they get from electoral participation (opportunity to present their programme to wide public, etc.) This argument is mostly made too much of, but there may be something in it.

Conclusion: it is quite insufficient to verbally criticise parliamentarianism and then sink back into an inactive abstentionist posture. The crucial thing is to build the alternative extra-parliamentary opposition - without this, all criticism of parliamentary politics remains academic self-indulgence (see Lenin's admonition of Zasulich, quoted earlier).

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Libertarian socialism is largely (but not complately) "indifferent" to parliamentary politics (= representative democracy under capitalism). It is largely concerned with direct action/ organisation. This position differs both from marxism and from classical anarchism. The difference from marxism is that libertarian socialists refuse to contribute to the spread of parliamentary illusions, whether by deep involvement in electoral politics and parties, or such devices as "critical support" for Labour parties. The difference from classical anarchism is that libertarian socialists do not erect abstentionism into an abstract principle; a principle which in any case did not prevent anarchists from joining the bourgeois government of the republic in Spain.

In general, the slogan should be not "Don't vote, organise!", but rather "Sometimes vote, mostly abstain, but always organise!"